

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: APPLIED LINGUISTICS AT THE JUNCTURE OF MILLENNIA

G. Richard Tucker

INTRODUCTION

As Peter Stearns, the noted social historian, observed in the preface to a recent monograph,

However briefly and artificially, the turn of the century/
millennium will create a mirror in which we may be able to see
where we've been coming from and where we are heading and
wish to head. That's what the last turn of the century offered with
complex and instructive results (1998:xi).

I am personally delighted to have an opportunity to contribute “Concluding Thoughts” to this volume, prepared as it is at the juncture of millennia, since it provides a similar opportunity for reflection and prediction, and since for one reason or another I have been an active participant in, and observer of, developments in the field of applied linguistics for more than three decades. Indeed my own career path reflects clearly the permeability of traditional departmental or disciplinary boundaries that has at once contributed to the sense of excitement and potential in the field and simultaneously to its lack of rootedness (e.g., I have at various times held academic appointments in departments of psychology, linguistics, and modern languages as well as worked for a private philanthropic foundation and a mission-oriented non-profit organization).

I would like to preface these “Concluding Thoughts” by observing that our field owes a debt of great gratitude to Charles A. Ferguson (1921–1998) who from my perspective long demonstrated an influential and far-reaching vision of what applied linguistics is and can be (see, for example, Ferguson 1998). This vision, developed and articulated on numerous occasions, was exemplified, for instance, by his inaugural plenary address at the very first AAAL meeting in Boston in December 1978, by his lecture “Applications of linguistics: Issues and challenges

for the linguistic community” on the occasion of the golden anniversary of the Linguistic Society of America, and by his plenary address on the occasion of AAAL’s 10th anniversary meeting in San Francisco. Ferguson also contributed to our evolving discipline more broadly by his service as founding director of the Center for Applied Linguistics (1959–1966). In this latter capacity, he was uniquely responsible for bringing to the attention of educators and policy makers throughout the world the contributions of applied linguists to problems of educational and national development. Exemplary of his accomplishments were his work in shaping the five-country East African Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching and his convening of the series of Anglo-American–French dialogues which became the exceedingly productive International Conferences on Second Language Problems (the so-called ICSLP conferences).

When one thinks of distinguished scholarship in our field, it is hard to imagine a more productive or a more respected scholar. In addition to his generally acknowledged reputation as the world’s leading authority on Bengali, and some would add Arabic as well, Ferguson helped to define the parameters of the field of language policy and planning through his publications and his work as co-director of the International Research Project on Language Planning Processes. In addition, his early work on caretaker speech and on child phonology remain benchmarks for those who have attempted to follow in his footsteps. He was, as well, among the first to push the frontiers of the field by analyzing forms of speech such as sports announcers’ talk, an innovative direction at the time, but one which would not now seem out of mainstream at all today. So in a very real sense the depth and the breadth of the field as we know it today owe much to the scholarship, the vision, and the leadership of Charles Ferguson. It is fitting that he was the inaugural recipient of the AAAL Award for Distinguished Scholarship and Service and that he served us as a member of the Board of Editorial Directors of *ARAL*. I turn now to offer some integrative comments based upon the contributions to this volume.

OVERVIEW OF PROMINENT THEMES

Although each of the other 14 contributions to this volume stands alone and can profitably be consulted for specific and valuable information, the volume is also marked for me by the prominence of three themes: 1) a provocative and informative set of *reflections on disciplinary development(s)* (see, for example, Daoud, Kaplan and Grabe, Larsen-Freeman, Leki, Scovel, Takala and Sajavaara, Widdowson), 2) a clear articulation of a set of *major concerns*, and 3) a stimulating set of comments on likely *future directions* for the field (see, for example, Clapham, Crandall, de Bot, Kaplan and Grabe, Larsen-Freeman, Leki, Martin, Takala and Sajavaara, Widdowson). The second prominent theme above, the *major concerns* that were articulated, seem to me to be four in number: 1) a concern with the *social contexts* in which we conduct our research, develop our materials, teach our students, and contribute to policy formation (see, for example, Crandall, Larsen-Freeman, Leki, Martin, Swain, Takala and Sajavaara, Tarone); 2) an

intersecting and overlapping concern with social *identity* and the ways in which an individual's multiple identities may affect factors such as language processing or the development of literacies (see, for example, de Bot, Larsen-Freeman, Leki); 3) a concern with *neglect*—whether it be the pervasive neglect of languages other than English (see, for example, Swales, Widdowson), neglect in the professional training of scholars from the so-called developing world (see, for example, Crandall, Daoud), or neglect for substantive areas such as sign language and signing that could benefit from our concentrated attention (e.g., de Bot); and 4) a concern with the need for adjusting or broadening the dominant *research paradigm* to include the collection of longitudinal data from multiple disciplinary perspectives (see, for example, Leki, Swain, Tarone). In the sections to follow, I will comment briefly on each of these three prominent themes.

1. Reflections on disciplinary development(s)

From my perspective, the tone for this theme, and for the complexity and importance of the underlying issues, is captured by authors' observations such as the following (excerpted verbatim in many of the observations to follow and often without direct attribution): With respect to applied linguistics *per se* we are told that the development of a disciplinary field is a messy undertaking, and that full disciplinary acceptance will occur only to the extent that applied linguistics responds to wider social needs and to the extent that its expertise is valued by people beyond the professional field. However, despite the ongoing discussions and debates to which Kaplan and Grabe and others refer, it seems clear that the trajectory and the momentum toward disciplinary recognition is positive. Given this development it is probably inevitable that discussion of the autonomy of sub-fields or specializations would follow, and thus it was instructive for me that a number of contributors wrote specifically about the emergence of their fields as autonomous sub-disciplines. Larsen-Freeman, for example, described developments in the field of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) and suggested the publication of Pit Corder's article (1967) as marking the point of demarcation for the two areas. Leki commented on the disintegration of links between those working within the areas of writing and literacy and those working within the domains of TESOL and applied linguistics while Swales, on the other hand, painted a very different picture for the "field" of LSP (Language for Special Purposes). He notes that the disjunction between ESP/LSP and language acquisition, basic FL methodology, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics has in the United States left little space in graduate programs for ESP work...and the lack of professional preparation has had deleterious effects on research and program quality...so that as a partial consequence ESP/LSP has yet to establish itself as either a full profession or as clear sub-discipline in the language sciences. In similar fashion, Takala and Sajavaara observed that systematic effort needs to be taken to develop professionalism in the area of LPLP (Language Policy and Language Planning) and that such professionalism could well involve emulation of the development of educational evaluation as a separate discipline leading ultimately to the autonomy of LPLP as a discipline. I was left with the distinct impression that the centrifugal

forces at work will inevitably lead to continuing fragmentation of the field and enhance the likelihood posited by Martin that applied linguists could wind up as pidgin speakers of a range of theories, with theory so divorced from practice that any possibility of creolization is pretty much foreclosed.

2. A set of major concerns

As mentioned, I saw four cross-cutting concerns woven throughout the various contributions. These dealt with the importance of social context(s) and social identity, with issues of neglect, and with calls to broaden the prevalent research paradigms. Concern with the importance of attending to social context was ubiquitous. As Crandall noted in her review of teacher education, decontextualized theory fails to consider the multidimensionality and the unpredictability of the classroom environment. Takala and Sajavaara highlighted the centrality of context in their view of LPLP as a recursive cycle of CIPP (context, input, process, and product). Other contributors (e.g., Leki, Martin) spoke of literacy as social practice and of linguistics as social actions to be recontextualized in relation to new problems. Clearly the pendulum has swung over the past two decades as noted by Tarone and by Larsen-Freeman who observed that mainstream SLA is not (or at least is no longer) asocial and who described a growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of social factors in second language acquisition. For me personally, the most compelling invitation came from Martin who asserted that there is a plethora of critical discourse analysis which focuses on power and how it oppresses, but noted that what we are lacking is a complementary focus on how social subjects design change. If, Martin noted, we understood better the phenomenon of change in all of its multiple dimensions, then we could use this understanding to inform our social interventions—an observation that has profound implications for the training of future generations of applied linguists. In this regard, Swain provided a fascinating description of the ways in which a multifaceted program of research and evaluation of French Immersion programs—that was at once sensitive to and supportive of the complex social and political dynamics surrounding language education in Canada—has both led to educational change but may also atrophy as the experience become “normalized.”

Several contributors voiced an intersecting and overlapping concern with social *identity* and the ways in which an individual’s multiple identities may affect language processing or the development of literacies. De Bot, for example, speculated about the contributions of social psychological factors in language processing and wondered whether a speaker’s *status* as minority or majority member affects the processes of perception and production. Larsen-Freeman reminded us that non-native speakers have multiple social identities that they bring to any situation and that being a language learner is only one of them, while Leki and others called our attention to the necessity to be aware of, and draw upon, the multiple home literacies that students in many of our classes bring with them and that will inform and either facilitate or inhibit the development of so-called

academic literacy. Thus, those working within a sociocultural framework remind us that learners actively (co)construct their own learning and identity in adding another language to their repertoire and that we must be sensitive to such factors in our research, in our teaching, and in our theory building.

I found the concern with *neglect* to be the most poignant theme that underpinned many of the contributions. The multiple expressions of this theme were particularly distressing given the frequency with which they have been articulated in earlier editions of *ARAL*. So yet again, contributors remind us of the pervasive neglect of languages other than English. Swales decries, for example, the prospect of real loss of professional registers in many national cultures with long scholarly traditions; Larsen-Freeman calls attention to the paucity of research on the acquisition of non-European languages; Leki describes the absorption of writing researchers with English language contexts and with monolingual English-speaking countries. In a complementary vein, Daoud calls attention to our collective neglect in the professionalization or development of “local” researchers and scholars. He noted the conspicuous absence of host country nationals at the pioneering 1975 Hammamet Conference on Language for Specific Purposes and asserts, probably accurately, that the composition of the participants would likely not be very different today. Crandall, too, calls our attention to the need for extending socially, culturally, and pedagogically appropriate training programs to “non-native-speaking” teachers of language(s) who likely comprise numerically the most rapidly expanding pool of teacher candidates. Lastly, contributors expressed concerns for neglected *areas*—so, for example, de Bot devotes considerable attention to the area of sign language acquisition, processing, and use. In the aggregate, these areas of concern with *neglect* are profoundly depressing since they recur so regularly in our survey literature.

The fourth expressed concern in this category—that of broadening the dominant *research paradigm*—is quite different. This is more a call for ensuring that we provide graduate students with broad, as opposed to narrow, methodological training; that we encourage them to consider collecting, examining, and interpreting data from multiple perspectives; and that we stress the importance of collecting longitudinal data to provide a more comprehensive frame within which to examine conflicting claims (in this regard, see also, Tucker 1999a). Swain, for example, makes a cogent case for the necessity for “tracer” studies to examine the life choices pursued by the graduates of French Immersion programs, while Leki draws our attention to the value that can be added to our understanding by examining the acquisition of literacies over time.

3. Future directions for the field of applied linguistics

With respect to the third prominent theme, I will comment briefly on some of the thoughts expressed by contributors concerning future directions for our field. One consistent focus was a prediction of greater uses of technology in teaching and learning and the conduct of research (see, for example, de Bot on neuro-imaging;

Clapham on assessment; and Kaplan and Grabe on implications for all aspects of our work as well as the remarks of Swales and Widdowson on the potential uses of corpus linguistics). Although I agree that we seem destined for presently inconceivable enhancements in this area, I have expressed concerns elsewhere (Tucker 1999b) as a result of my review of the extant educational literature and my continuing review of demographic trends and projections. These concerns combine to suggest that: 1) we must give concerted individual and collective attention to the problem of allocation and distribution of technological resources, and 2) we must implement as soon as is practical a multi-faceted and longitudinal research agenda to examine the value that is actually added for students who pursue some or all of their continuing education using innovative technologies.

In addition, there appeared to be broad agreement about the importance of collaboration in student learning, research, and research training (Kaplan and Grabe) and of ensuring that students are well versed in so-called paradigmatic as well as non-paradigmatic points of view (Larsen-Freeman). Nonetheless, Martin's caution that we not focus on training which features eclecticism stands in contrast to some of the other contributors and deserves our attention. Simultaneously, Crandall predicts the closer intersection of developments in teacher education with those in general teacher preparation while Clapham directs our attention to continuing developments in the areas of performance testing, alternative assessment, and a concern with ethical considerations in assessment and testing.

Clearly, the most striking cumulative impression for me was one of the vitality of the field. There are regular fora (e.g., the conferences of the *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée*, and the American Association for Applied Linguistics) devoted to facilitating communication among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers; there are numerous journals, reviews, or series uniquely devoted to publication of work in the area; and there are many new monographs published annually on diverse aspects of this topic. Although I believe that the question of financial support for work in the broad domain of applied linguistics remains problematic, it seems inevitable to me that, at some point, policy makers and prospective funders will come to realize the centrality of language issues for educational and national development.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

By way of conclusion, let me note that the United States continues to receive over a million immigrants, legal and illegal, each year and that the foreign born is the fastest growing segment of the population. The most accurate prediction that we can make is that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future together with an increase in the number of native born individuals who will speak English as a second language. In addition, it is estimated that approximately one third of the population in urbanized western Europe under 35 years of age will have an immigrant background by the year 2000. These indicators suggest that the importance of language as a critical component of educational and national

development in settings throughout the world will persist and likely grow more pervasive.

A recent study commissioned by the British Council on the future of the English language (Graddol 1997) underscores the growing need for all individuals to develop bilingual proficiency in order to be able to participate effectively in our increasingly global society. This situation poses challenges and opportunities for the applied linguist to craft a truly *applied* research agenda that can examine longitudinally, and from multiple perspectives, some of the perplexing questions that persist (NCLE 1998): What is the role of native language oral and literate proficiencies in the acquisition of a second or later studied language? What instructional sequences and approaches work best, and with whom? How can technology be effectively utilized? What is the relationship between teacher development on the one hand and program quality and learner attainment on the other? What immediate and long-term impact can be expected from various types of adult instructed-language programs? Which extant assessment instruments can reliably and validly document change in learner proficiency and at which levels?

Hopefully, during the decade ahead—with support from various public and private philanthropic sources—collaborative groups of researchers, educators, policy makers, and administrators will begin to ask questions such as these and gradually begin to aggregate relevant qualitative and quantitative data to shed light on the underlying issues. From my personal perspective, the search for answers to questions such as these should be accorded an exceptionally high priority since the *stakes* are so high. Consider information such as the following:

- Nearly one-sixth of the 5.9 billion people in the world cannot read or write according to a survey published by UNICEF (as reported in *The New York Times*, December 9, 1998);
- Three of four children in the “poorest nations” in the world are not in school (excerpted from the United Nations Human Development Report as reported in the *New York Times*, September 27, 1998);
- The additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all, and clean water and safe sewers for all is roughly \$40 billion a year—or less than 4 percent of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world (*New York Times*, September 27, 1998);
- Providing universal primary education for all would cost about \$8 billion per year (of the \$40 billion mentioned above) which equals:

About four days’ worth of global military spending,

Seven days' worth of currency speculation in international markets,
The amount spent by Americans each year on cosmetics,
Less than half of what Americans spend on toys for children each year,
Less than the annual amount that Europeans spend on mineral water.
(*Washington Post*, April 3, 1999)

I have long been struck by some remarks made by Courtney Cazden (Cazden, *et al.* 1990) in a report to UNICEF in which she noted: "...despite the centrality of language achievements in the developmental agenda of the [child], language issues are rarely in the forefront of thinking about how to plan environments for young children.... The prevalence of multilingualism in the world adds a particular urgency to the recommendation to attend [to the quality of language instruction available to the child] (p. 48)." Alas, these remarks are as relevant today as they were nine years ago.

I think it appropriate to end with what I find to be an apt quotation from Charles Ferguson (1998):

In this autobiographical sketch I have made a point of the tension in my career between activist or 'applied' problem-solving on the one hand and 'pure' linguistic analysis and theory building on the other. While I recognize some validity to this dichotomy, I have never been able to agree with the extreme valorization of either at the expense of the other. It has always seemed to me that a theory that has little or no practical problem solving capacity is ipso facto less good than one that does and that one of the best places to look for clues to theory is in situations of 'application' (p. 54).

Like most of us, I eagerly await the further elaboration and development of our discipline in the millennium that is just beginning.

UNANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cazden, C., C. E. Snow and C. Heise-Baigorria. 1990. Language planning in preschool education with "annotated bibliography." Report prepared for the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. New York: UNICEF.
- Corder, S. 1967. The significance of learner's errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. 9.147-159.

- Ferguson, C. A. 1998. Long-term commitments and lucky events. In E. F. K. Koerner (ed.) *First person singular III: Autobiographies of North American scholars in the language sciences*. Philadelphia: J. Benjamins. 39–57. [Amsterdam Studies in Theory and History of Linguistic Science.]
- Graddol, D. 1997. *The future of English*. London: The British Council.
- NCLE (National Center for Literacy Education). 1998. *Research agenda for adult ESL*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Stearns, P. N. 1998. *Millennium III, Century XXI: A retrospective on the future*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Tucker, G. R. 1999a. An applied linguist reflects on SIL's role(s) and selected activities. *Notes on Sociolinguistics*. 4.3.77–99.
- _____ 1999b. The applied linguist, school reform, and technology: Challenges and opportunities for the coming decade. *CALICO Journal*. 17.2.1–25.